

Day in the life of

Forest dynamics researcher.

As the morning mist started to dissipate with under the warmth of the orange rising sun, the Gibbons troops whooping morning chorus slowly started to fade quietly into the forest behind us, and for the briefest of moments the rainforest about us took upon an eerily silent cloak. A bird fluttered within the canopy of a huge fruiting jambu jambuan tree to find its breakfast and let out a triumphant caw, the spell is broken and the forest comes alive again. In fact the tropical peat swamp forest of central Kalimantan like most tropical rainforest is rarely quiet. The dawn chorus of birds and gibbons – that often acted as our alarm clock (without the optional snooze button), is soon replaced by the humming of insects, the chattering of distance primates and the musical gossiping and alarm calls of brilliantly coloured, yet often unseen birds. I slowly began to look up at the reason for the lack of vision; strong wide buttresses fanning up into a wide umber coloured trunk, with a rope-type pattern – reminiscent of a Cadbury's flake (well we had been here for quite a while). Splitting off the thick twisting branches, leading into the rich green tapestry of interwoven, striated canopies, the variety highlight the myriad of tree species that make up the tropical peat swamp forest. This unique floral habitat was reasons I was here.

'Tidak ada apa' – '*No problem*' – echoed around me. My reverie of the forests around me was broken by the sound of one of my counterpart's Kitso - an indigenous Bornean dyak student/lecturer, welly deep in peat swamp water fighting with a clinometer and a 10 meter tape that had magically twisted itself around the head height saplings and palms which scattered long the forest floor. This was our last transect, we had been in the forest for 12 weeks and the rainy season had come with a bang, flooding the forest and restricting our movements to jumping, swinging and wading from hummock to hummocks, back to our more primitive instincts. All movement is hampered by pneumatophores emerging like mantraps from the water, by this point after much debate we convinced that they had a mind of their own and were secretly carnivorous. But the area we were surveying was primary forest that we had spent almost all of those 3 months searching for. We had previously been in several areas disrupted by illegal and selective logging, devastated by forest fires. All bearing the permanent scars of disturbance – drastically reduced numbers, stunted sapling growth, high full growth tree mortality and tinder dry peat. But here in the tall interior forest, we had finally found a sizeable remnant of pristine primary forest, awe inspiring to see the forest teeming with life both plants and animal. Only about 20 years ago Central Kalimantan was covered with forest such as this, now it took us almost 3 months and a 15 km trek to find this area, but it was still here acting as a refuge and beacon to what once was and possibly could be again for fauna and researchers alike.